

2016-05-12

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/4673>

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10.1016/j.annals.2016.04.002

Annals of Tourism Research

Elsevier

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**This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Elsevier in Annals of Tourism Research, 12 May 2016 available at:**

**<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016073831630055X>**

**DOI: 10.1016/j.annals.2016.04.002**

**Acceptance date: 11 April 2016**

**Embargo Period: 24 months**

# Lithuanian Genocide Heritage as Discursive Formation

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a synthesis of Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* and the concept of discursive formation to critique museums and sites of memory as spaces in which competing discourses of cultural identity emerge. The research context is the troublesome place of genocide and victimhood in discourses of occupation in Lithuanian museums and sites of memory. Analysis suggests that these exhibitions produce a rarefied field of knowledge around the ideas and concepts that they reveal, and, as discursive tourism texts, they play a role in maintaining the cultural identity of Lithuania. The contribution offers a novel, post-structuralist framework for understanding exhibitions as sites of discourse production, since it is the first study to deploy the ideas from *Archaeology of Knowledge* into an analysis of specific heritage sites.

**Keywords:** *Foucault; Archaeology of Knowledge; Discursive formation; Heritage tourism; Lithuanian Museums and sites of memory; Genocide and holocaust*

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism sites have been conceptualised as sites of conflict which compete to authorise 'official' representations of cultural identity (Bandyopadhyay, Morais and Chick, 2008). Graburn (1997) suggests that heritage tourism can be viewed as a state-sponsored practice that privileges the dissemination of shared cultural identities. Heritage is a signifier of culture (McIntosh and Prentice, 1999) and it has been acknowledged as an inseparable aspect of tourism, and a practice through which government communicates idealised national narratives (Squire, 1992). Such narratives are entwined into the image of destinations through heritage tourism products and experiences. Museums and sites of memory are examples of tourism heritage sites which articulate officially sanctioned discourses of cultural identity (Park, 2010) and which serve as material testimonies of destination identity.

Such spaces play a role in inventing tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) since they appear to be part of a natural, timeless narrative that is integral to culture. They are, however, in many cases, recent additions to the cultural landscape that stage privileged representations of national cultures which legitimate and normalise political messages and ideologies. The cultures that are contemplated in heritage settings are therefore ripe for critique, and the idea that they are unmediated should be challenged since they are "...cultural carriers of ideology, imbedded in selective versions of history" (Goulding and Domic, 2009, p. 99). The institutions that articulate them can be said to constitute a discursive device which represents culture as a unified discourse. To date, research approaches that have been mobilised in tourism research to critique the discursive practices of heritage tourism have included ethnography (Park, 2010), participant observation and interviews (Goulding and Domic, 2009), content analysis (Buzinde and Santos, 2008) and conceptual discussions including Moscardo's (1996) reasoning around mindfulness in planning interpretation. Existing research has therefore overlooked important insights that might be gained from understanding the discursive practice of exhibiting, and how culture is articulated in heritage institutions and, in particular, in 'official' (state supported) museums and sites of memory (Bandyopadhyay et al. 2008).

In particular, at the time of writing no other published research has offered a critique of heritage discourse based on the concepts and ideas that are espoused in Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (henceforth, *AoK*), and much of the research that has been published in the related subject of dark tourism has been developed based on the social scientific epistemological lenses of positivism and interpretivism (Wight and Lennon, 2007). The novelty of this approach is therefore its profoundly philosophical methodology and its deployment of a synthesised interpretation of *AoK* into a discourse-analytical method.

There is therefore space within the literature to use discourse analysis to challenge the ways in which cultural identity is reproduced and experienced, and how they are maintained as illusory social and cultural constructs that produce destination discourses. Discourse analysis can be useful to explore Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) suggestion that museum objects are not 'found', they are 'made' and given value as statements in a discursive field of cultural knowledge that organises the context in which materials are seen. As such, this study offers a novel research philosophy and strategy to critique the discursive construction of identity in museums and sites of memory using a discursive analytic informed by Foucauldian thinking. It focuses in particular on the constructed history of 20<sup>th</sup> century genocide and occupation in three high profile museums and sites of memory in Lithuania. The paper develops on previous observations that these sites are examples of the type of heritage tourism that has developed in ex-communist regimes Park (2010) and they offer a selective interpretation (Wight and Lennon, 2007) of genocide and occupation that foregrounds the ethnic Lithuanian victim, whilst simultaneously backgrounding Jewish Holocaust. The concept of discursive formation is reviewed and then deployed as a research strategy to analyse the rhetoric of genocide and occupation in three Lithuanian heritage sites which interpret occupation and genocide.

## **1.2 MUSEUMS AS DISCOURSE**

Museums can be considered from a Foucauldian perspective as 'surfaces of emergence' (Foucault, 2002, p.45) or spaces for the articulation of discourse, since they produce imagined cultures, nationalities and discrete histories. Such heritage sites are presented to visitors as part of

the wider social construction of destinations. Notably, discourses do not simply *reflect* social meaning; they also constitute such meanings (Fairclough, 1993, cited in Smith, 2004). Discourses are constructed through the 'speaker's' position within any discipline such that their institutional locus can be mapped out through discourse analysis. As sites of discourse production, museums are spaces in which national culture is produced, transmitted and received (Edensor, 2002). They can be considered as tangible statements of cultural identity which legitimate a wider, touristic discourse of destination (Beerli and Martin, 2004). Based initially on the oeuvres of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu, and later on contributions from authors such as Crimp (1995) and Hooper-Greenhill (1992), discourse analysts have tended to approach museums as sites "...for the classification and ordering of knowledge, the production of ideology and the disciplining of a public" (Henning, 2006, p. 1).

Much of the published discourse-related research into museums influenced by Foucault's *oeuvre* has hitherto been grounded in genealogy and the tracing of the historical conditions that have given rise to the various societal roles that museums have occupied (Lord, 2006). Foucault's genealogical ideas have been applied in particular to review the evolution of museums from private collections through to nationalistic temples of culture. Authors such as Crimp (1995) Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Conn (2000) have conceptualised museums as institutional articulations of power. These studies have in common a focus on developing ideologies and concepts for understanding museums as broad cultural surfaces, yet none of them are based upon the application of research methods to test these ideologies. Indeed, there is, at the time of writing, no published research that has systematically applied an interpretation of Foucault's concept of discursive formation from AoK to *specific* cases of museums, or to groups of museums sharing a central interpretive theme within destinations. There is therefore scope to develop ideas to respond to this lacuna in order to carry out research into the role that heritage plays in constructing destination discourses.

The premise of Foucault's thesis is that systems of thought and of knowledge production are governed by rules that produce conceptual possibilities for 'knowing' in particular fields and periods of time. AoK is Foucault's reflection on the type of thinking that led to the production of his earlier theses on madness (Foucault, 1965) and Western penal systems (Foucault, 1979). Although AoK is accepted in the fields of the social sciences and the humanities as Foucault's only explicitly analytical method (Anderson, 2004; Shiner, 1982 and Neal, 2006), he "...wrote provocatively to disrupt equilibrium' and sought to avoid being 'prescribed'" (Graham, 2005, p.2). There is therefore no universally acknowledged resource to access that prescribes and generalises Foucault's work into a prescriptive methodology. However, some convincing intellectual commitments to the application of this body of work to studies of culture and of the leisure sectors have been published. For example Graham (2005) applied the principles of AoK to education, and later Radford, Radford and Lingel (2011) offered an archaeological analysis of libraries and deaccessioned volumes.

Closer to the context of this paper, Bryce (2007) examined destination discourses of the Orient based on similar principles, and O'Donnell (2012) and O' Donnell and Spires (2012) applied syntheses of the framework to the televised Super Bowl and media constructions of the 'Tartan Army' in Scotland. These studies suggest that archaeological discourse analysis can be a productive critical lens where the aim is to identify and analyse 'statements' (discussed later), and the modes of enunciation, or rules, that these are bound to. Central to the undertaking of archaeological discourse analysis is developing an understanding of the 'material effects' or discursive practices of discourse which reveal '...knowledge reproduced through practices made possible by the framing assumptions of that knowledge' (Clegg, 1992, cited in Smith 2004, p. 64).

Heritage articulates its objects of discourse in preferred contexts inherent to the practice of exhibiting (Smith, 2009). These discursive objects can be conceptualised as a body of anonymous statements which emerge in the time and space of a given period; what Foucault terms an *episteme*. To identify a discursive formation in the context of museums and sites of memory is to contextualise the museum and its interpretive practices as 'enunciations' (Foucault, 2002). Analysing enunciation



through discourse analysis represents an attempt to identify discursive regularity (groups of rules governing what can be said) within dispersed statements. The three museums that have been analysed for this study are identified below. The concept of discursive formation is then introduced as a methodological strategy for critiquing their discursive strategies for maintaining knowledge of Lithuanian genocide and occupation inside a rarefied field of knowledge.

### **1.3 GENOCIDE AND OCCUPATION IN LITHANIAN MUSEUMS AND SITES OF MEMORY**

Lithuania was selected as the research context for this study in order to more closely examine observations made by Wight and Lennon (2007) about the selectivity of interpretation in Lithuanian occupation-themed museums. An accumulation of familiarity with three museums and sites of memory was developed across a five-year period between 2007 and 2012. In terms of site selection, there is a finite supply of genocide/occupation-themed tourism heritage sites in Lithuania that are 'visible' in commercial tourism marketing resources such as waytolithuania (2015) and tourslithuania.com 2015). The sites were therefore selected on this basis, and each interprets events associated with an historical era (1921-1991) defined by foreign occupation and genocide, including Jewish Holocaust. The sites are summarised in Table 1, below and their thematic, interpretive content is identified along with details of location, funding sources, thematic content and, where available, visitor numbers.